

THE
METHODIST REVIEW
QUARTERLY

Vol. LXI, No. 4.
Whole No. 216.

OCTOBER, 1912

THIRD SERIES
Vol. XXXVIII, No. 4.

FAITH AND MIND.

BY REV. P. T. FORSYTH, M.A., D.D.,
PRINCIPAL OF HACKNEY COLLEGE, HAMPSTEAD, LONDON.

I

It is common to-day to hear a protest against theology, on the ground that it is an intellectualizing of what is really a religion of the heart and conscience; that it is the capture of Christianity by an aristocracy of mind. But it might arrest some of this mindless protest, if time were taken to ask what theology really means. We might then note that there is theology and theology. There is what may be called a primary theology and a secondary. And they are thus distinct as from speculation so from each other. The one is the statement of revelation, the other its exposition. The former belongs to the very nature and definition inseparable from Christian faith as soon as any attempt is made to pass beyond mysticism and convey it; the other belongs rather to its scientific and expansion treatment. The one can be verified by experience, the other only by study. There is truth which produces faith, and truth that faith produces.

For instance, if we say that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, or that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, we are stating the source and marrow of our Christian faith; and since every one of the terms is theological, we are at the same time confessing that without theology this faith has no meaning, and becomes a mere mystic and lonely intuition, as sweet, perhaps, but as mute and powerless as the daisy,

"whose great bright eye most silently Up to the throne is cast." Every word of statements so simple and essential to a social Christianity carries on its face the theological truth, and without it religion becomes mere rapt religiosity, mere individual spirituality. Of course if we think only of religion, and not of faith, we may be content with some expression of our subjective attitude—like "the sense of dependence," where (with most of the favorite modern religion) we state something about ourselves rather than about our God. But when we rise from our subjectivity to speak of faith, some truth about its object and creator is inevitable. And it is equally inevitable that that object, and not our attitude, should be the main matter. The truth in faith, therefore, can only be theological at heart. It makes theology of the primary kind, without which faith is not faith, nor Christianity Christian, but we are left with mere religiosity, or spirituality, or humanism.

If, however, we go on to draw out the exact thing that was done by the Son in relation to the Father in redemption, or the science of Christology, or the (trinitarian) conditions under which the Eternal proceeds *ad intra*, then we enter upon a scientific, or secondary, theology. It may be theosophy (strictly speaking) rather than theology. It handles not so much the power, but the wisdom, of God; not his grace, but his psychology. It does not directly belong to faith, however inseparable from a Church, and it is not presented in faith's first passionate account and confession of itself.

Now it is the neglect, or the refusal, to distinguish in this way that has caused some of the resentment felt when the plain Christian is summoned on his life to believe in a theology. There are often included under the name theology matters on which he knows himself incompetent to pronounce, which are outside his, or perhaps any, experience. And he naturally objects to be called on for assent to such matters with a pistol at his head. Neither he nor, perhaps, the authors of the demand realize the difference between such remote or speculative points and those that are bound up in the very statement of the faith which, to our experience, does save us from our peril. But, for all that, Christian experience is not possible without Christian intelligence.

It is not to be denied that often a saving theology has suffered

from its too close association with a scientific theology. In Germany, particularly, this has happened. In the training of the ministry there, for instance, an extravagant regard has been had to the latter. The education for the pastorate has been organized far too much in the interest of theology as a science, and the culture of the practical, ethical, and religious side has suffered accordingly. This must always be a danger when theology is made a mere university study, and is dissociated from the Church, its pulpits, its pieties, and its occasions. Most Churches can never hope for a learned ministry—if only we could preserve an educated and a competent. It is upon the primary and experimental theology that our pulpits work, our faith lives, and our Churches thrive. It is in an intense but generous grasp of the primary theology, rather than by an accomplished interest in the secondary, that we have our future. And this is true, indeed, of the whole Church, which otherwise becomes but a school. It is not easy to say which danger is the greater, pietism or rationalism. Faith may soften into the mere sentiment of religion, or it may stiffen into the mere rationalism either of amateur heterodoxy, or of a crustacean orthodoxy which loses the perspective of theological values, rates all Christian truth alike, makes scriptural form final, and includes all its hard science as essential in its faith.

Now the primary theology is not vaguely mystic for lone emotion, but positive for thought and action on the world; and it therefore makes demand on the mind. It exploits world ideas and aspirations. It appeals to the spiritual understanding, in the great, penetrative, and sagacious sense, in the sense in which we speak of the vast understanding of Dante or Shakespeare. The secondary theology is rather the work of the acute, speculative, or architectonic intelligence. The one goes with insight, the other with purview. The one is more creative, and is associated with a revelation; the other is more deductive, and goes with a system. The one draws on the ethical, the other on the rational mind. The one goes with moral greatness and its synthetic grasp, the other with intellectual power and its analytic range. The one gives a heaven, the other a horizon. And as the one may degenerate into the goody, the other may sink into the clever; while the one may decline to futile mysticism, the other falls to the level of the religious witling.

II

The contempt for any theology is really a symptom of the philistinism which goes with that pedantry of actuality, that morbid devotion to outward things, calling itself healthy-mindedness; or it is a sign of the levity which goes with much of the temperamental and subjective religion of the hour. It betrays a poverty which has only to go far enough on the same line to end in Church bankruptcy and moral pauperism, if the Church's history has anything to teach us at all. Let us be clear. Theology has no special claim to the general attention of Christians unless it is a part of our religion, the objective element of it. It has no claim on the Church as a scientific hobby—like, say, the geography of the Holy Land. If the doctrine of the Trinity is merely the ideal physiography of the divine nature, without any direct connection with Redemption, and therefore with religion, we can leave it to the speculators whose philosophic interest moves that way. But if theology do represent that element in religion which gives it footing in the Eternal and preserves it from a subjectivity atomic and flighty, it is vital to the Church. For the Church's first requisite is an objective, intelligible, and storable Gospel. And the contempt and neglect of theology would mean that the sons of light should roam the hills as children of the mist.

Theology is not always an academic interest forcing itself pedantically upon a practical Church; it affects the fountains of life and work. Why should any Church work but for those ends of the kingdom of God whose very statement is a theology? The theological interest is not for the Church like the programme of a social class struggling for a place in the sun; a class which feels how great a lever for its purpose the Church would be, and tries to capture, exploit, and even monopolize it, with a jaunty and juvenile indifference to everything but a new sociology. The society that most nearly concerns the Church is itself, as the only society created by the Gospel; and its belief is its most intimate affair. Its theologians are therefore an essential part of its ministry. It is by its theology also that Christianity is superior to every other faith in the world. Judaism, which comes nearest to it, has no theology to speak of—nor has Buddhism, also very near. Christianity is superior by an element in it which to express is to state a

theology, and to expound which has produced the only really great theology in the world. Of course it is not meant that every Christian must be capable of discussing or teaching scientific theology, nor indeed every minister. Like the Bible, it is the property of the corporate Church, rather than of individuals. Individuals should not be called on to assent to its scientific forms; but they ought to be called on to respect the place of these for the great Church and the great faith. They ought to be subdued to the frame of mind which is interested in interpreting the systems, instead of rejoicing in the ignorance which despises them. That is true of theology which the Reformers said about the Sacraments—the deadly thing is not ignorance of it, but scorn.

The misfortune which dogs us here is the fruit of individualism and sectarianism pursued as permanent ends, and not as temporary means or expedients. Church and theology are inseparable correlates. But in so many cases the independence of the single soul or sect has been cultivated till all sense of the great Church has gone. And in words about the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church people cease to hear a solemn music. To their too suspicious and protesting minds such words carry but suggestions of the Pope behind every bush. Very many are in more danger from the abuse of their own liberty than they are from the authority of Rome. It is an extravagant and *insouciant* liberty that drives many to need and to welcome Rome. We do not need more liberty—at least in the circles nearest the present writer. We have won what we need, and more. What we most need is some authority for whose sake we may use it, and by whose guidance we may keep it from credal nihilism. We may, and do, so use our precious liberty that we both lose a center for the soul and drive the public into the most imperative Churches to escape an anarchy we do not seem able to stay. The fate is sealed of any Church whose creed is the region of its anarchy instead of the order of its mind. Free lances raid, they do not conquer. They keep the district awake, and even rob it of due sleep, but they do not bring life from the dead. It is impossible without a common, credible, and liberal type of belief to fulfill the Church's mission to save society. She cannot make herself respected, to say little of being trusted, still less of being nobly loved. We must have over individuals an objective which saves them from mere

singularity. Let us keep in his proper place the man whose one argument for the Gospel is that it does him good and he feels it. He would say the same thing for some hours after a tasty meal loaded with ptomaines. The Gospel which fills human need is not to be measured by it.

We must recover the sense that we are all constituent members of the great federate, historic, universal, eternal Church, and all servants of a Gospel which would be true if it cost every man his happy comfort, as it cost the Saviour his in the dereliction which saved us on the Cross. We are the agents of a grace which our sects and communions have to serve and not exploit. And with that sense must return a new solidarity of generous belief, if we are to speak in the gate with the *mind* of a growing age, to state our message in terms commensurate with an educated world, and to confess our faith in the form of thought which strikes a kindred chord in those who think on a world-scale, and who do not simply peddle notions or dream with a raw and flamboyant ambition.

III

But let us view this matter of the intellectualism of religion from another side.

We can never have a biography of Christ in the modern and impressive sense of that word; and therefore we cannot get at what is known as the inmost religion of Jesus. By the religion of Jesus we may mean one of two things—either the staple of his teaching which we try to follow, or the manner of his experience which we try to reproduce. If we mean the former, we have it only in the New Testament, *i. e.*, in the apostolic interpretation which pervades even a Gospel like Mark. No other interpretation was ever known in the Church till the over-critical and artificial constructions of to-day. The whole history of the Church has been made on a totally different idea of Jesus from these, and one he printed on those who knew him best. We can never get at a religion from Jesus which can stand on better evidence than the apostolic Gospel of Him. How can we? We cannot get behind the Gospels, *i. e.*, behind the Jesus of the oldest Christian community, so far as documents go. (I do not forget Q, which was apparently found inadequate by the Church.) And this is a Jesus who is also the Christ (*i. e.*, the King), whose atoning, redeem-

ing death was the crisis of history, and whose risen and regal life was the surest of spiritual things, as sure as catastrophe, death, and judgment. And either we have no historical Jesus, or we have him in the picture of his personality presented in the Gospels, written by men permeated with the evangelical interpretation of him. The same evidence which gives us the Synoptics gives them to us saturated with the apostolic Gospel, the Gospel common to Paul and Peter and John. The earliest community was that of Jerusalem, one therefore too Jacobean, too little creative, to give ground to doubt the fidelity of their version of Christ. They were nearest to Jesus, and they did not feel they were false to him in interpreting his Gospel as an atoning one. This is the plea of a critic so able as Jülicher, in his *New Lines in the Criticism of the Gospels*, who also points out how little critical results, or efforts at a "religion of Jesus," can do for what the Cross and its evangelical theology serve so richly—the production of new religious life.

On the other hand, if we mean by the religion of Jesus his personal experience of God, his soul history, his inmost life, his spiritual psychology, this is beyond us—from the very nature and purpose of our documents, deep though we may now go on this track compared with our fathers. We can divine much as to his inner life, but not as to his inmost. We can never analyze his deepest motives, nor follow up either the causation of his resolves, the pragmatism of his acts, or the secret of his personality. Nor can we pursue where his life was hid in God. In this respect he is too elusive, and our constructions are too poor, too artificial. Who would venture to reconstruct one of his midnight prayers? "Others abide our question, He is free." The story is too meager, and it is told in another interest—in the evangelical interest, and not the psychological. Therefore as our interests begin to leave the simplest and broadest features of his life, as we seek to penetrate and refine, we are less and less impressed (however interested) from this interior source. We are in the region of conjecture, of imagination rather than revelation. So that we return to the other aspect of the religion of Jesus as the source of the impression made on us after all—what Jesus pleased to express in his teaching.

But if we do that, if we make that the gauge of revelation, are we not back again with the spirit and method of the Orthodoxies,

though in a simpler and more gnomic form? Aphoristic orthodoxy replaces systematic. We are dealing with revelation as if it were a matter of truths and precepts (however kindling) instead of a matter of action, personality, and power, as if it were a theology instead of a grace that was revealed. We are responding to truths and statements, to Christ the prophet, rather than to Christ as God's personal presence and redeeming deed. It is the historic fact of the whole person, and especially the act (not the mere incident or casualty) of the Cross, that guarantees and continues for us the objectivity and reality of revelation. It is such spiritual history, such ethical effect as the eternal act of the Cross, that must save us from intellectualism—whether it be the intellectualism of Jesus the gnomic sage, the intellectualism of the credal systems, or the intellectualism of exact historical science. It is an historical theology, a theology whose shape is history rather than system, a theology whose interest is moral rather than dialectic, a theology crystallized in a Church rather than a creed, a theology of the immanent, ethical, and dynamic act,—that is what must save us from an intellectualist theology, old or new. In like manner, in philosophy, what we are now concerned with is not a hypothetical metaphysic of thought, but an energetic metaphysic of experience; not substantial Being, but universal energy; not a static entity, but a creative and evolutionary power, which does not furnish the ground of Being, but the fountain of life.

The kind of mind therefore that concerns us, our faith, and our future, is the mighty practical understanding which grasps, in a holy Redeemer, the whole moral situation of the race and its sin: it is not the capable intelligence, the ordinary, able, but often dull, intelligence, that correlates truth, or reforms the correlations of the past more or less aggressively. As Christianity is not a science, truth (in the modern sense of truth) is not its first charge. And, as it is not literature, it is not primarily concerned with an impressive style, or a neat and telling knack of putting sacred things. We have, above all, to do with life, with reality,—moral reality, which is the chief sense that the word truth has in the New Testament. We need more mind in our religion, not less, as the pietists plead; but it is the massive moral understanding, not the clear, crisp, and thin intelligence. We want the powerful dramatist, like Ibsen with his sense of guilt, not the smart playwright,

like Bernard Shaw with his sense of incongruity and his elfish delight in its exposure. (Though even the cynicism of Mr. Shaw is better than the blind sentiment, or the stodgy naturalism, or the moral stupidity which exasperate him.) It is just this intelligence in one dimension, this flat intellectualism basted with sentiment, that so many of the new and glossy theologies promote. And what they neither show nor create is the searching moral understanding, taking joy in divine and saving judgment rather than delight in merciless analysis and exposure. This massive moral understanding is the greatest lack in the culture alike of our press, our pulpit, and our stage. They have not the sense of the moral tragedy of history, nor of the final *commedia* of God.

Theology becomes a matter of public moment, it ceases to be a mere pursuit, only when it becomes a piece of religion. In Christianity it is always that implicitly; and the present juncture has made it explicitly so. We have to call out our reserves. To ministers of the gospel especially, their theology is an essential part of their religion. To discard the theology is to "pith" the religion, to extract its marrow. Hence for us the cause of Christianity is practically the cause of Paul. What is challenged to-day, in the interest of what is called a "lay-religion," is the substantial Paulinism which contains the *differentia* of Christianity, and the note of its permanence, absoluteness, and finality. There is less question raised about the subjective religion of Christianity (except among those who follow the wild lead of a genius like Nietzsche). The whole issue is its theology. It is not its ethic, except in so far as its ethic is concentrated in the new and holy creation of the Cross, and made absolute in the New Humanity. It is there, in its Christology, for instance, that the battle must be fought which either saves or sacrifices its future. In a true sense I say it is a battle for Paul more than for Jesus—in the sense that, as Paul saved the Gospel of the Cross in the first century and in the sixteenth, so he must in the twentieth. And I will venture to express my sorrow and failing of heart when I hear this matter of our Christian creed treated, even by preachers, with an indulgent smile, as if it were an academic hobby instead of a believer's crisis: when it is dismissed with a veiled assumption that all intelligence is wasted which does not go into religious sentiment, passing politics, or the social reforms of the hour; as

if Christianity were there chiefly to magnify the child, the woman, or the workingman, rather than glorify God. These interests are indeed urgent, but it is a creed that is essential, it is a living creed about God and his grace that is the Church's greatest need. The first question for a Church is not what it does, but what it believes. It does too little because it believes too little. To denounce a theology is to announce atheology at last (if the truth will carry the quip). And it is for a creed rather than a programme that the trustees of Christianity in our pulpits are really crying out. They are crying out for it with an earnestness proportionate to their sense of the situation, and to their discovery of their own inadequacy to meet the situation when the vague young ardors that made their first capital are consumed in the fires of experience.

IV

That the creeds and theologies are the deadliest influences in the way of intellectualizing Christianity and removing it outside the pale of warm human interest or ethical concern, is not a view which the history of dogma will sustain. The whole *nisus* of the historic Church in this direction cannot have been a vast stupidity, unless the Church was abandoned by the Spirit in its early youth. And the whole inner object of the Reformation was to bring the religion of the Church back to its fundamental theology.

It is not the creeds that are intellectualist, but their idolaters or their critics. It is impossible to rise from a study of the Augsburg Confession without feeling that it is another than the intellectual interest that is supreme there. And even in the Athanasian Creed it is Redemption, and not metaphysic, that is the chief concern. That creed is the confession of eternal Redemption in the language of the hour. It is not the theologies of the Church that are academic, but some of the theologians—especially the amateurs and the half-educated among them. Also it should be noted that an intellectualism has followed on the great confessions (as in the seventeenth century), when they were taken in hand by the gospel-hardened successors of the great confessing age.

But there is another intellectualism that precedes the creeds—I mean the intellectualism of the heresies. It was the heresies that called the creeds into being. What is a creed? It is a necessary, but not a spontaneous, product, *non ut diceretur sed ne taceremus*.

Every formal creed is an effort to adjust the positive faith of Christianity to the challenge created by some heresy. The heresy itself arose at certain points where secular history and natural thought came in contact with the surface of Christian faith or life. For Christianity has often as much to do in resisting the formative influences of an age as in absorbing them. Now the genius of natural thought is intellectual; and the genius of Christianity is voluntarist; it is moral. This means that its appeal is not to logic, nor to science, nor to any close thought or single idea, but to the will, the conscience, the personality, the life—to the region, that is, which defies and eludes our efforts at a perfectly coherent scheme of the world, to the region which transcends "sanity," and which Kant called the "Irrational." Christianity refuses to be explained by causes, or to take its rational place in a complete unity of conception. Its great and vital paradoxes, like the Trinity or the Cross, mock common-sense, and all that kind of preaching which is like stating a case clearly to a judge, or making a secretarial report on Christianity to a meeting of its shareholders. It deals with purposes, ends, and destinies rather than causes and coherencies; its object is neither a vote nor a verdict, but a venture of faith; and its unity is the unity of effective reality rather than of consistent truth, of telic purpose rather than organizing idea. It is as far beyond the intellectual grasp as our moral freedom is beyond scientific analysis or philosophic construction. Deep within the form of the confessions the reality and continuity of living Christian faith has been flowing on from the beginning.

In Xanadu did Khubla Khan
A stately pleasure-house decree,
Where Alph the sacred river ran
In caverns measureless to man.

Our systems are such stately fabrics—and especially on their apologetic side. They are like great bridges thrown, at successive points, across the river of life; they are like palaces whose casements open upon the infinite sea in fairylands. Or, to change the figure, in the interior of the Christian realm the life and business of the kingdom of God has been going quietly on, while a long series of frontier wars have engaged the energies of its apologists and the attention of the public. These apologists have only

been called in to delimit a scientific frontier in the face of surrounding human nature. Often they have engaged in peaceful negotiation, but sometimes it came to a fight. And at intervals the situation became serious enough to compel a reference to the central government, a great (and sometimes unseemly) debate in the parliament of the Church, and authoritative action from its government. It was thus that the creeds came into being. They were indeed created by the Church's faith, they were not perversions of it. But they were not so much spontaneous expressions of the great realm's massive life as they were considered and strategic assertions of it in the face of a situation created from without. We have these inspired expressions of the Church's deep life in her liturgies rather than in her creeds, in the *Te Deum* rather than in the *Athanasium*.

In so far, therefore, the creeds were neither complete nor final. Nor could they be. For, in the first place, they must be psychologically inadequate. Faith must always fail, more or less, when it tries to give an account of itself, especially to the world.¹ It is so much more than it knows. It fails thus even in respect of its own time, far more in respect of a later age. And in the next place, they are for us intellectually inadequate. They were the verdict of Christendom on the mental junctures of a time now outgrown. They were conditioned, on the one hand, by that aspect of the Christian idea which happened to be uppermost at the hour—it might be Redemption, it might be Reconciliation, it might be Incarnation—and, on the other hand, they were determined by the form of the challenge from without. Now this challenge came mostly from the philosophies of the natural and rational man. It came mostly from some form of rationalism. Therefore the reply had to speak the same language. It had to be intellectual and rational. But in the creed that was only the language. In the challenge which provoked the creed it was the matter, but in the reply it was only the language; in which another matter, a super-rational matter, strove to take an expression that could only be intelligible by being partial. The creeds are intellectual not in genius, not in substance, but in form—in so far

¹One reason why the Reformed Confessions are so much greater and deeper than the Ecumenical Creeds is that they were made to the Catholic Church, while the creeds were declarations for a pagan world.

as they had to speak with intellectualism in the gate. In the Athanasian Creed the matter at issue was the reality, supremacy, and finality of Redemption, but the language, the form, was the metaphysic of the day. These creeds are replies by men of a new spiritual race (tracing, by a second birth, from Christ, and not from Adam), to men who for the most part were but once born, and who did not seize the personal, volitional, and regenerate nature of Christianity, but were arrested by its external, humane, and rational side. The life of Christianity has never been dependent in the first degree upon the power of its believers to commend and adjust themselves to the day's philosophy, to those constructions of the world that prevailed in the surrounding civilization. For Christianity is not a part of culture. It is not one of the tributaries of civilization, nor one of its products. Its history refuses to be explained by the science of comparative religion; its nature and genius is intractable to any other science than its own. It is a main stream, perfectly independent and unique, rising in the miraculous heights of a fresh divine causation; and if it ever join with the stream of civilization, it receives that stream as a tributary, and absorbs it into the vaster volume and power won from the moral heights where it rose. Its history is a positive and autonomous thing. So is the Church, as the only society that faith directly creates and controls. It rose far and high, directly from God in his Son. And it is fed all along its course by the influx of rivulets innumerable that spring from the less direct action of the Spirit upon the wills of men in natural society. The line of its course through history is indeed determined by the features of the country through which it flows, by the geology, so to say, of the natural man; often, too, it is discolored from its banks, or deflected by nature's convulsions. But its volume, power, and quality are all its own. And its total direction and purpose are prescribed (with whatever windings) by the hills where its life rose and the sea to which it goes. To drop metaphor, its intellectual variations have been, and must be, great; but the moral genius of its life-power, the action of its Holy Spirit, remains autonomous, positive, continuous, and imperative. There is a great creed within the creeds, and a persistent spiritual burden and vital purpose, which ought to recast them rather than discredit them. Its face wears countless expressions of sympathy, and it is

the fruitful mother of a thousand more. The note of moral deliverance, of guilt and its holy conquest, the note of Eternal Life, still sounds and dominates these to the attuned and cultivated ear, on the scale of a whole complex humanity. And the faith that triumphs is not, in the first degree, a faith that adjusts in a scheme the many colliding forces of the world, or presents a *Weltanschauung* systematically complete; but it is a faith that issues from a central act of world-reconciliation met by repentant personal faith. That is to say, it has its element in those moral powers of the new creation, the new birth, the New Humanity, the new world, which confound our logic; and it has its consummation in the final redemption of souls reconciled, far more than of forces harnessed, or thoughts harmonized. It has to do, primarily, not with saving knowledge or its sum, but with a saving Personality and the Church which He saves—saves, and does not simply impress. There lies reality, not in thought, but in experience, in regenerate experience, which replaces man's dislocated center upon the eternal center of the moral universe, and in a corporate experience. Experience is a concourse of Egos, of wills. Reality, therefore, is a kingdom of will, personality, and action. Its world is far profounder, more elusive, and more intractable than the world of processional or conflicting ideas. It is a kingdom, not a process. It is a world of warring wills subdued into a cosmos, and not a mere congeries. Its end is not a resultant, but a conquest. And its goal is a new world wherein dwells not consistency, but righteousness, yea holiness; a world which demands, for the gauging of it, far more massive mind than the idealisms do, and ever so much more than the systems; a world incomprehensible except to the will of the Spirit in whom it was created, reconciled, and redeemed.

The supreme concern of Jesus was the love of God to sinners. It was not God's general kindness to weak men, but his gracious love to sinful men. It was his merciful kindness and not his genial spirit, his forgiving and not his benevolent love, his grace and not his pity. God's revelation was not his kindly care of his creature, not his shining sun nor his helping hand; but his redeeming will of holiness, and its absolute power to overcome and rule the whole of history at the center and at the last. The news of the Father who makes his sun to rise on the evil and the good is, as a

gospel, incomplete—like the story of the prodigal, which was not a gospel; but one illustration of a gospel at one great angle of it. Neither message could have established itself in the world without the atoning Cross. There was too little tragedy in them to cope with so tragic a world. But the parable comes the nearer to the heart of grace. We must always interpret Christ's Messianic consciousness in these terms of the Cross, and its theology, of the living grace latent in him always. It sent him down among the people with his healing word, instead of out of the wilderness with John's trumpet tone. And it brought him to the Cross, charged as a subverter of the divine order of society, and a supplanter of the elder brother in the father's regard; so bitter against grace can religious nature be. One keeps meeting, within the Church itself, frequent surprises which, by their avowed sympathy with the elder brother, show the lengths to which respectable nature will go in its *visus* against grace, the "righteous" against the repentant, the prosperous against the prodigal, society against the sinner, the rational against the wretched, the happy possessors of the kingdom against the outlanders grace reclaims from the world.

V

Nothing but the eternal act of the Cross, and no analysis of it, can convey what Christ came to bring.

It is true that Jesus *taught*, in every way suggested by his rich mind at the moment, the love of God to sinners, the love that seeks rather than enjoys, and delights to find even more than to possess.

It is true, farther, that he not only taught but *felt* the love of God to sinners—never indeed *to* himself as prodigal sinner, but *in* himself as perfect saint. He felt to sinners as God felt. His love to them was as God's love. And his compassion was as God's—chiefly for their sin—deep for their sorrow, but deepest for their guilt.

Farther still, it is true that he not only felt this gracious love of God, but he *exercised* it. He was the high steward and plenipotentiary of God's saving love. He was not simply its voice, nor its reflection, nor even its agent, but its sacrament. He dispensed alike the pity, the judgment, and the forgiveness of God by life and deed. And especially the forgiveness. It was his forgiveness, more than his denunciations, that roused the hatred of the Pharisees. Forgiveness* is exasperating patronage if we do not

feel we need it. All his acts of pity and healing were exercised by him as acts of forgiveness (as the Church's philanthropy is but a fruit of its Gospel). To the sick of the palsy he said, "Thy sins are forgiven thee." That was his reading of the central, radical situation of suffering humanity. And this is the greatest function of his Cross—to convey God's grace to sin in a sacramental way, as the radical, final, eternal remedy of the Almighty, All-searching Eternal for human ills.

But we must go a step farther. He not only taught, felt, exercised the love of God to sinners: he was not only its sacrament, nor its symbol, he *incarnated* it. He conveyed it only because he incarnated it. And to incarnate the love of a God who is love, is to be God. All our previous terms have been too poor. Even sacrament. We have sacraments of him, but he was more than a sacrament of God. For a sacrament is a created thing. All these terms are too poor for the work love has to do with us sinners. Even the sympathy they convey, close and warm as it is, is a sympathy too detached for the need of our case. He was love; and he believed with all his soul in God's love. But was his love actually God's? It is one thing to say it was *as* God's, the divinest we know, what God's love would be if God loved. But does he? Is God love, and is this the loving God? Is this utter man inmost God? Is this man, who is the last word of spiritual humanity, the Eternal Word of Holy God? For the redemption we needed, we needed a God not only near and warm but identified with us, and therefore *sure* to us in a certainty that nothing but Incarnation could effect. The Christian faith gives us an intimate Christ who was, indeed as in word, the very Son of God, in the sense of being God the Son. If he be not God's incarnate love, all he does is to *report* on God's love, either by word or deed, to give us God's truth where we needed God's life. And that is the bane of intellectualism, orthodox or heterodox. It is something more than a witness borne from without God that we need for our absolute and certain faith. It is the very presence and action there, in us, of God himself. To deny this is to fail to grasp the moral situation, which for religion is a fatal failure. But this presence and action of God in the conscience of the race is what the Gospel of Christ gives. As a matter of experienced fact we do get God there, touching, seizing, judging, saving, and changing us. This

interpretation is the only possible justice to such religion of Jesus as we can reach. The faith of those first Christians who were in closest contact with the religious Jesus was that he was much more than religious, that he was the object of religion more than its subject, that he was the Son of God, with a title to their worship like God's title, and an action upon them which drew that worship from them in spite of themselves. Were they wrong? Was his real action upon them so poor after all, so false, so unsteady, that it could not protect them from an error so tremendous as that of worshipping him as God, which they certainly did, and setting him with God on the great white throne? So to worship Christ is to treat him as other in kind from all mankind besides.

The only utterance which can grasp the whole actual moral case of an active sinful world is a personal act of the Holy One, and an act of more than mundane scope prolonged within the experience of the Church. The salvation must share the nature of the sin in so far as this, that it must be an act, and an act at least as great as the moral solidarity of the race. It cannot be any statement about God or grace by the word of the wisest sage, nor even any reflection of Him mirrored in the life of the humanest and purest saint. For Redemption, prophets and saints were failures. Christ himself failed as prophet. The moral reality of the guilty world can only be dealt with as it is grappled by the personal act of a Soul more than commensurate with the world; by the act, therefore, of one essentially greater than the world of nature or man; the act of one with a greatness more than human or cosmic; the eternal, saving act of one so adequate to see and do as the Son of God. Apart from this, if he overcame the world it was only in himself and for himself, as we all have to do. It was only in his section of the world. But he conquered and saved on the scale of the whole world, nay of God. And no less a Soul than that, vaster than man and the peer of God, could, with all he saw of the total situation of man and history, possess and command himself in such power and peace as made him master easily of every passing situation, free to play his foes with the wit, the dialectic, and the irony of the Most High, and able to forgive as only he could against whom we sin, and to save as he alone could from whom we were lost.

Hackney College, Hampstead, London, England.